United Nations E/AC.51/1998/L.7/Add.20

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
25 June 1998

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Thirty-eighth session
1-26 June 1998 (part I)

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Thomas **Schlesinger** (Austria)

Addendum

Programme questions

Report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 26, Public information

1. At its 22nd meeting, on 18 June 1998, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative for section 26, Public information (E/AC.51/1998/6 (Sect.26)).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the new narrative in respect of section 26, Public information, and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the section.

Discussion

3. Great importance was attached to the public information activities of the Organization. The reorientation of the public information activities was noted, under which the communications function was being placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. Appreciation was expressed for the efforts to reach out to new audiences and to convey the message of the United Nations at the grassroots level. Note was also taken of the emphasis given to communication and dissemination of information at the country and local levels. It was emphasized that it was essential for the Organization to explain the role and range of its public information activities. The view was expressed that the promotion of priority issues, such as peace and security, sustainable development, environment, ageing, drug abuse, crime control and women and economic development should be given solid support. It was pointed out that, since the image of the United Nations

98-18264 (E) 250698

in some countries was positive, unlike in some others, information strategy to different target groups should be devised accordingly.

4. It was observed that some of the activities under subprogramme 1, Promotional services, and subprogramme 2, Information services, appeared to be similar and thus required clarification.

5. Concern was expressed that, unlike in the medium-term plan for 1998-2001, there was no adequate reference made in the new programme narrative to cooperation between Member States and the United Nations in the field of public information activities. The view was expressed that it would have been useful to indicate performance indicators in the narrative, so that the achievement of the objectives and its timeliness could be measured.

6. Attention was drawn to the conclusions of the Committee on Information and the view expressed that qualitative enhancement of information material, training courses for developing countries and economies in transition, and publication in the six United Nations official languages were not reflected adequately in the new programme narrative. The view was expressed that the description of the role of the United Nations information centres should have been further elaborated, and comments were made to the effect that no mention was made of the needs of the host Governments.

7. It was observed that certain phrases, such as "close contact" in paragraph 26.4 (a), "key constituencies" in paragraph 26.8 and "innovative ways" in paragraph 26.9 required clarification. It was also pointed out that the overall guidance referred to in paragraph 26.4 (a) was provided by the intergovernmental bodies, and not by the Secretariat, and that the latter was to follow those guidelines.

8. The view was expressed that the priorities mentioned in paragraphs 26.7 and 26.10 should be based on the medium-term plan. With regard to the order of listing priority issues, it was pointed out that peace and security should have been placed at the beginning and, although the list of priorities was not exhaustive, information activities on peacekeeping operations should have been included.

9. The organization of the first United Nations World TV Forum was appreciated. However, the view was expressed that it would have been more appropriate to mention such examples in the introductory remarks, rather than in the programme narrative. It was noted that another edition of the Forum would be organized by the Department in 1998.

10. Great importance was attached to the role of the United Nations information centres and field offices. It was pointed out that further strengthening of the United Nations information centres and field offices should be encouraged. Support was given to the professional training in respect of the United Nations information centres, but concern was expressed about the limitations imposed by the resource allocations referred to in paragraph 26.12. The view was expressed that the United Nations information centres might include the host country's language in addition to the six United Nations official languages in their public information material. It was noted that, as the key communicators to the European public, the role of the United Nations Information Services at Geneva and Vienna was very important.

11. Clarification was requested as to which subprogrammes under the Public information programme carried out the information activities pertaining to the campaign for the global awareness of the critical economic situation of Africa, and the view was expressed that, in addition to publications, other forms of public information should also be used in support of the awareness campaign.

12. It was noted that there was a good balance in the new narrative between traditional and electronic media. However, it was pointed out that, while the best use of modern electronic information technology should be encouraged, due priority should be given, in parallel, to the traditional media, such as print media, radio and television. It was emphasized that the role of such traditional media was extremely important in disseminating information, especially in developing countries, since that still remained the best placed media to reach all the corners of the world. While expressing support for the use of electronic means of communication, especially the Internet, the view was expressed that the possibilities of transmitting the United Nations messages through the Internet in all six official languages should be explored. The observation was made that the United Nations home page was one of the best, but concern was expressed that it was not available in all the official languages of the United Nations.

13. As regards direct shortwave broadcasting, the view was expressed that, since there was no decision on the matter yet, its mention in the new narrative was inappropriate.

Conclusions and recommendations

14. The Committee commended the inclusion in the programme narrative on section 26, Public information, of quantified targets for a number of outputs. That would help in assessing performance. But the Committee noted that the formulation of objectives in the section could be improved. In particular, there was little indication of the quality of output expected to be achieved, or how progress towards the achievement of objectives should be measured. The Committee expressed concern that, without such yardsticks in the programme narrative, eventual evaluation could not fully determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the programme.

15. The Committee therefore recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to improve formulation of objectives and indicators of expected achievement when preparing the proposed programme narrative for this programme for the next biennium.

16. The Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly the approval of the new programme narrative for section 26, Public information, subject to the following modifications:

(a) At the end of the second sentence of paragraph 26.1, *add* and 52/70 of 10 December 1997.

(b) In the last sentence of paragraph 26.2, *replace* 1996, of the first United Nations *with* 1996, and in 1997, of the United Nations.